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The Norfolk



Natterjack

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Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Articles with the camera symbol have associated photographs in the Nats' Gallery (centre pages)

Toad-in-the-hole....

This edition covers once again the many facets of natural history, including further revelations on 'Nostoc' and the exciting news of the rediscovery of a plant not seen in Norfolk since 1914! Also the great news of a possible new bug for Norfolk which turned up in the Castle gardens in the centre of Norwich.

Thanks again to all contributors and photographers, please keep sending in your notes. Also a special thank you to Steven Martin for the Excursion reports.

FF

More Views on Nostoc

To the Rev. R. Churton

Seleburne Jan.4th 1783

Extract from a letter:

I am glad that you met with the Star-sluch in Cheshire after you had examined the Tremella nostoc in Hants. Not that I had any doubt myself that the former was a vegetable, but because I met with intelligent people who are still perswaded that this substance is a mass of indigested food cast up out of the stomachs of crows! And some have told me that they have distinguished the limbs of frogs among it! As to a star-sluch growing on the bough of an oak; this must have been a matter of accident. The seeds of all Fungi you know are lighter than air and therefore float about in it; and vegetate only when they fall on a proper nidus.

And again to the Rev. Churton on August 20th, 1783:

-----Pray hunt for star-sluch, because several intelligent people, one at present in this house, stare and wonder when I advance that the matter is vegetable; and Dr. Chandler in particular shakes his head and asserts that the matter is frogs thrown up indigested. But I beg to know why crows are not sometimes crop-sick, and have not weak digestions in Hants(yet we have no such appearance)as well as in Cheshire. Apply a magnifying glass to the substance, and try to discover the seeds.

*Your obliged servant
Gil.White*

Extracted verbatim from volume two of the edited letters of Gilbert White by Thomas Bell 1877.

Alec Bull



Colonisation of former arable farmland by four species of orchid.

Craig Robson



On the 13-29 June 2008, I noted a colony of at least 650 *Dactylorhiza* orchids on part of my 'local patch', Hellesdon Pastures, near Norwich. The orchids were mostly Southern Marsh- *D. praetermissa*, but I also found a single Early Marsh-orchid *D. incarnata incarnata*, four Common Spotted-orchids *D. fuchsii*, six hybrid Common Spotted x Southern Marsh-orchids *D. x grandis*, and a single Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*. This may not seem remarkable in itself, but what is amazing, at least to me, is the fact that this was a ploughed field with three pairs of breeding Lapwings in 1989!

I think that the field ceased to be ploughed around 1991, and last year was the first time that I noticed some orchids - the hybrid between Southern Marsh- and Common Spotted-orchids, on 26 July; so it took 17 years for the habitat to transform from nothing, to botanically rich meadow with scrub.

It took quite a few years for grasses to take hold in the field, but once that happened it was suitable for horse-grazing. Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Dog-rose scrub began to appear at one end of the field in the early 2000s, and is now developing quite rapidly. Recent years have also seen a dramatic increase in the amount of Yellow Rattle, which is clearly benefiting other flowering plants. It is a fascinating experience to watch the gradual succession of habitats.

The area is currently unprotected, but surrounding fields form the Hellesdon Pastures County Wildlife Site.

National Trust Gardens: Appeal for Specialists

Mary Ghullam

This year the National Trust is hoping to encourage people with specialist knowledge to help it record wildlife in its gardens. While this applies to all National Trust gardens, anyone wishing to record at Felbrigg Hall gardens, particularly out of hours (i.e. Thursdays and Fridays), please could they contact the head gardener, Tina Hammond -

Email: tina.hammond@nationaltrust.org.uk

Telephone 01263-835007.



Identification of *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* (Box bug) – a first for Norfolk?



Doreen Wells

On the 30 May 2008 at 16.10 I saw this bug on a Cherry tree (*Prunus sp.*) in the gardens of Norwich Castle Grid Ref: TG 233 085; the tree was growing next to Hazel *Corylus avellana*. It very kindly posed for photographs and then flew off, not to be seen again. I was quite excited about this sighting, but contained myself until Ken Durrant confirmed my identification! Ken also said that he did not know of a recorded sighting in Norfolk before.

The Box bug has been moving out from its original Surrey location into the Home Counties for the past few years, but it looks as if it is now moving north. Does anyone else have sightings for *Gonocerus acuteangulatus*?

A find from far away (2)

Shortly after the May 'Natterjack' was published I received the following letter, in response to Ken Durrant's note on the shield-bug in the salad bag, from Maurice Davenport (an 'out of county' member from Dorset) -Ed.

'With reference to the shield-bug found in a packet of rocket salad. Last year I found a similar insect in a packet of cornflakes. It was alive on discovery. I sent the specimen to the manufacturers in the hope of getting an identification, as there was no "country of origin" listed on the packaging, but the reply enclosed only free vouchers for further cornflakes!'

'We have heard much about foot and mouth, avian 'flu and BSE in recent years, but little of Colorado Beetle and other potential insect pests. Do these still pose a threat to our crops?'

(Colorado Beetles were a great pest to potatoes in the 1950s and a reward was issued for any captured beetles. Intensive spraying at the time controlled the insect and it has not established itself in the UK. According to Defra beetles are often imported with produce from the continent each year, notably parsley and potatoes. It remains a notifiable quarantine pest. -FF).



MINSMERE BIRDS

Tony Howes



Minsmere is always an interesting place to visit, but the month of May is probably the best time of all, with lots of birds about, plenty of activity, and new arrivals coming through almost daily.

Visits to this RSPB reserve during this May proved very enjoyable with lots of photographic opportunities. At the east hide Little Terns were seen just outside the windows, facing into an easterly breeze as they hovered hoping to catch a prawn or small fish. At the sluice, Swallows were obliging, perching on the walls or the signposts showing off their long tail streamers and blood-red throats. Marsh Harriers were numerous, drifting on languid wings over the vast reed-beds, also Bitterns were seen, mostly at distance, but one was photographed very close to the island mere hide as it skulked about in the rushes just outside.

Green Woodpeckers as usual were on the heath-land 'anting'. This woodpecker seen up close, is a stunningly beautiful bird, if you could spot them before they saw you there might just be a chance of an image or two by a careful approach. Two or three Little Egrets were striding about in the shallow water of the scrape, as too, were fair numbers of Black-tailed Godwits and the ever present delightful Avocets which must rank highly on the 'most elegant bird' list.

For me however, the highlight was to find a Nightingale, in full song, sitting right out in the open on top of a hawthorn bush. Wonderful!

New behaviour by garden Wood Pigeons

Don Dorling



We have lived here at Hethersett for more than fifty years and during that time we have watched the various birds that have visited the garden. Also during that period the garden itself has evolved from a largely vegetable & fruit patch to its present lawn and flowers with a few wilder corners. Included in the small collection of trees are three lilacs, which must be almost fifty years old and are still flowering profusely.



In the early days the appearance of a Wood Pigeon would have been exceptional but in recent years they have become regular visitors and their behaviour has changed. They are now almost tame. I often wonder if their confidence has been encouraged by the appearance of Collared Doves. This latter species has always had a greater tolerance of man and has been seen regularly in the garden for many years.

Earlier this year we had huge numbers of Wood Pigeons flying over as they commuted between some large trees to the northeast of the garden and the oilseed rape field across the road to the southwest. Fortunately only very few came down to feed in the garden but from early June a small number, up to six, have taken to feeding avariciously on the leaves of the three lilac trees. For some days they seemed almost addicted to this source of food and have been very difficult to discourage. In all the years we have been here I have never noticed this behaviour before.

I wonder if any other readers have witnessed a similar behaviour pattern.

Purple? More likely, blue (with cold)

David Paull

Hans Watson's quest (Natterjack 101) to discover whether Purple Sandpipers really are purple brought back memories of our first winter in Norfolk, the winter of 1981-82. On the last weekend in January 1982 we were due to return to our old haunts to visit friends in Hertfordshire. We had a phone call: "Don't come. A Land Rover can't get up our road because of the snow." Then a call from an elderly aunt in North London whom we had planned to visit en route: "The roads are dreadful. The cars can hardly move because of the snow."

Snow? What snow? There was no snow in Norfolk. Everywhere else in the country, yes, but not in Norfolk. It was our first experience of what I came to regard as the Norfolk Drawbridge Effect and a classic example of the county's capacity to "Du different".

But it was cold, very cold. Our weekend visit cancelled, I went down to Winterton beach on the Sunday morning. There was ice on the sea for several yards out.

But there, sheltering near a breakwater, was a Purple Sandpiper – my first. A lifer! After all, they are not exactly abundant in Middlesex.



The Raptorial Songbirds

Hans Watson



Many birdwatchers no doubt enjoyed splendid views of the long-staying Great Grey Shrike in North Norfolk earlier this year, particularly as this species is a declining visitor to the county.

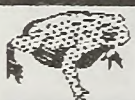
I have always found the shrikes a fascinating group of birds, and have been fortunate enough to watch and photograph shrikes of several species, including Great Grey shrikes, in a number of countries. It has always seemed to me that there is something anomalous, about birds that have attractive (but not outstanding) songs, and raptorial tendencies. This is particularly so when their songs often contain mimicked phrases of the songs of some of their victims, a feature thought by many people to bring victims within attack range. This is especially so with the Great Grey Shrike.

The diet of these shrikes is dependent on seasonal availability. On their breeding territories I have seen few large prey items, such as birds and mice taken, but mostly large insects. However, a Norfolk heath in winter and early spring provides very little in the way of large insects, and so the diet is small birds and any voles or mice that expose themselves in daylight. Many observers find it hard to believe that these birds are quite capable of killing birds larger than themselves. There is a clue to this ability, in the sturdy hooked bill that is also equipped with tooth-like projections on the edges of the upper mandible, very like the true birds of prey. The list of prey taken is impressive and includes birds as large as Fieldfare.

My first encounter with the North Norfolk shrike came on the 10th of April, when I realised that the shrike's chosen territory coincided with that of a pair of Dartford Warblers and possibly two pairs of Stonechats. Alas, no Dartford Warblers were seen and I am reliably informed that both of the pair became meals for the shrike. The only Stonechat that I saw was singing on top of a gorse bush about 60 meters from the Great Grey Shrike, and showing none of the concern that it would have shown if a Sparrowhawk or Kestrel had appeared. Other birdwatchers witnessed the Dartford Warblers show a similar lack of concern.

I have seen small birds show this puzzling nonchalant attitude in the territories of Southern Grey Shrikes and the related Fiscal Shrikes, and have yet to find a convincing explanation.

I imagine that I am not the only birdwatcher that sincerely hopes that the Great Grey Shrike chooses a different location in Norfolk to stay, if it returns next winter.



Pembrokeshire Birds

Tony Howes



The natural history of your local patch is always a great joy, and gives much pleasure, always there is something new to see and learn from. But it's good to have a change of scenery now and again, and get to grips with something different.

And so it was in June of this year, a friend and I took the long journey over to west Wales, our sights set on three of that country's special birds, Peregrine, Raven, and Chough. I had been to this stretch of Pembrokeshire coast before, so we knew where to start our search.

It's a very spectacular coastline, rocky and rugged, the cliffs clothed in great masses of wild flowers filling the air with exotic perfume at this time of year. We were fortunate in getting fine weather while there, all three days being sunny and warm, this added greatly to the beautiful galaxy of colour that the rich tapestry of flowers provided. With the azure blue of the sea as a back drop, an enchanting spectacle indeed, the scenery alone would have made the long journey worth while.

During the course of our stay we were fortunate enough to see and photograph all three of the target birds. The Raven family numbered four this year, you were left in no doubt when they were in the vicinity by their deep sonorous calls, we tried baiting them from a hide, but to no avail. Trying to capture them in flight with the camera was a challenge, these, the largest member of the crow family are very charismatic birds indeed.

The Peregrines were drifting overhead, quite a long way off, the first morning, the female much bigger than her mate, but at least we were able to get images of them both together. The only other sighting was a single bird flying along the cliff edge, they probably had an occupied nest round the next headland.

There were a dozen or so Choughs around this stretch of coastline and they were a real pleasure. The attraction for them were the fields right on the cliff top with horses, they would spend long periods prodding the short turf with their long red bills. Like their larger cousins the ravens they tell you where they are by their calls, we managed to get photographs on the ground as well as birds flying. These rare and beautiful birds are holding on in Pembrokeshire, on this part of the welsh coast Choughs and spectacular scenery just go so well together, it was a great pleasure just to be there and feel the spirit of this land on the edge of the sea.



Norfolk Bird Atlas - an update

Fieldwork for the Norfolk Bird Atlas (NBA), which started in December 1999, was completed during the summer of 2007. The results of the eight years of fieldwork will be published as a book entitled 'The Norfolk Bird Atlas – the summer & winter distribution 1999-2007'. The first drafts of all the 200+ full species texts have been written and work is well underway on the writing of the Introductory Chapters. Almost 200 vignettes have been received from over 20 contributing artists and the final format of the species' maps is currently being decided. Unlike many county bird atlases, abundance and distribution will be shown on the maps, which will cover both the breeding season and winter period.

The book will be in A4 format with the species texts and maps on opposite pages. The recommended retail price is likely to be in the region of £45 and publication is expected in the autumn of 2009. There may well be a pre-publication offer (in addition to that offered to NBA fieldworkers) and in order to help decide on the print run, it would be extremely helpful to hear from anyone who is proposing to purchase a copy of the book.

Moss Taylor, 4 Heath Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8JH
or email moss.taylor@btinternet.com

What a turn up!

Francis Farrow



Last October Sheringham Town Council embarked on the restoration of a dew pond on the Top Common, Beeston Regis (north of the A149). During the winter months it filled up 'to the brim'. From the end of June through to 24th July the water levels dropped until the pond finally dried up. The ephemeral nature of the pond is a prime habitat for amphibians, of which the vast majority had time to complete their development from tadpole to young adult.

An unsuspected bonus was turned up on 5th July by local naturalist, Mike Crewe, who during a litter pick spotted a small plant growing in the muddy margins of the receding pond. He identified it as Mudwort *Limosella aquatica*, which according to records checked by Bob Ellis (East Norfolk plant recorder) the species has not been observed in the county since 1914 and not in East Norfolk since 1902! The nearest locality to Beeston was Aldborough where Kirby Trimmer (1866 Flora) mentions it "*by the edge of a small pool on the north-east of the Green in 1862.*"

It seems that although the plant is an annual its seeds can survive a relatively long time. The digging out of the pond down to the clay must have disturbed the seeds and literally turned them up.



NATS' GALLERY: August 2008



WHITE ADMIRAL Second record for Beeston Common, 16 July 2008. White Admiral continues its northwards expansion; indeed, it can go no further than the north coast, where the species is now abundant at Holkham Pines. See article. *Photo: Francis Farrow.*



BOX BUG GONOCERUS ACUTEANGULATUS
Norwich Castle 30 May 2008. The first record for Norfolk? See article. *Photos: Doreen Wells.*



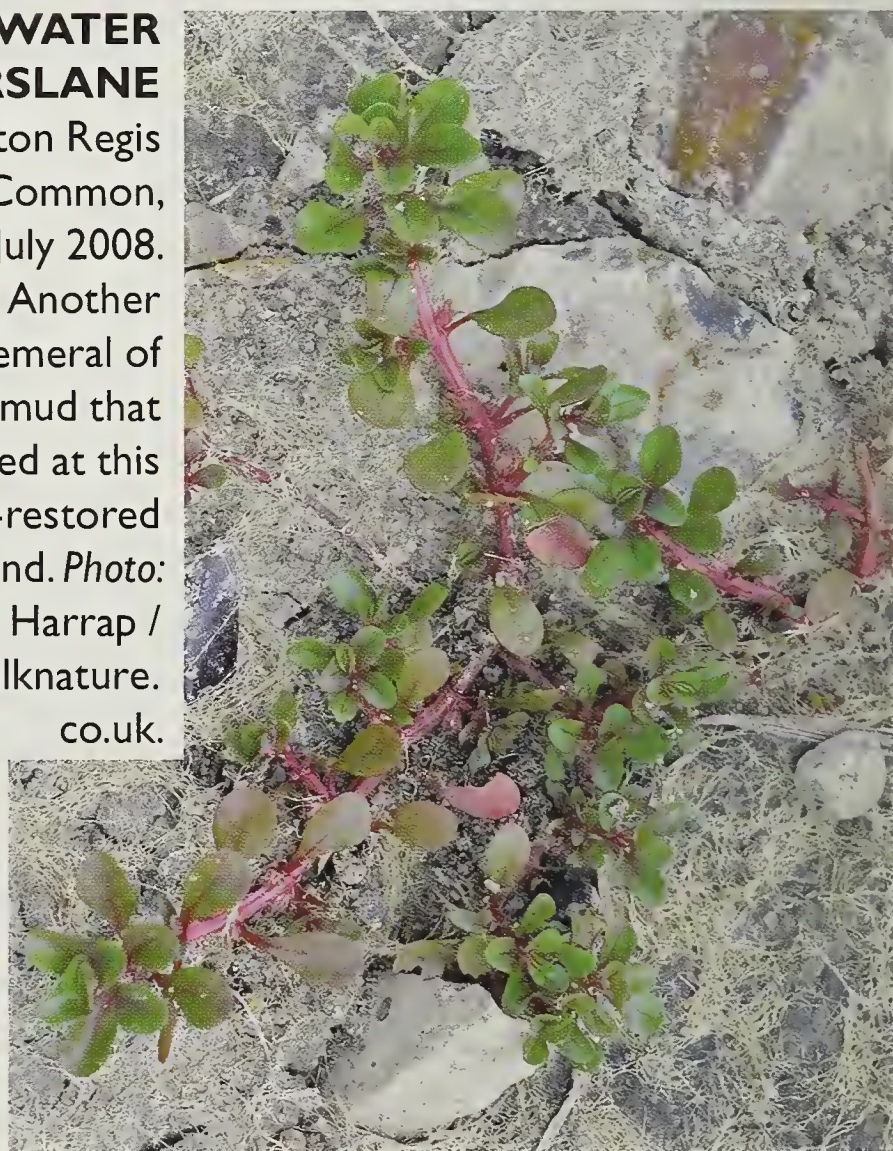


MUDWORT Beeston
Regis Top Common, July
2008. See article. *Photos:*
Mike Crewe.

WATER PURSLANE

Beeston Regis
Top Common,
31 July 2008.

Another
ephemeral of
wet mud that
appeared at this
newly-restored
pond. *Photo:*
Simon Harrap /
norfolknature.
co.uk.





DEW POND at Beeston Regis Top Common, reinstated by Sheringham town council in October 2007. As the pond dried out in summer 2008 Mudwort made its first appearance in Norfolk for nearly 100 years. See article. *Photo:* Francis Farrow.



COMMON BROOMRAPE

Up to 200 spikes appeared this summer outside the Riverside branch of *Boots* in Norwich. They appear to be parasitising *Brachyglottis* (formerly *Senecio*), a widely-planted shrub, often found around car parks! *Photos:* Dougal McNeill.



GREAT GREY SHRIKE on a north Norfolk heath. See article.
Photo: Hans Watson.



WOOD PIGEON helping itself to the leaves of a lilac in Hethersett. This once-shy species is now almost tame in some urban and suburban areas. See article.
Photos: Don Dorling.



PEREGRINE, RAVEN and
CHOUGH in Pembrokeshire.
See article. *Photos: Tony Howes.*



GREEN WOODPECKER, NIGHTINGALE
and **SWALLOW** at Minsmere, May 2008.
See article. *Photos: Tony Howes.*



Hide

NORFOLK & NORWICH NATURALISTS' SOCIETY IN ACTION

ROBERT MARSHAM TRICENTENARY MEETING

Speakers gathered at Robert Marsham's grave: left to right Alec Bull, Tim Sparks, Tom Melvin, Gerry Barnes (Chairman), Tom Williamson, Nick Greatorex-Davies and Dave Leech; interior of Stratton Strawless Church during a refreshment break. See article. *Photos: Tony Eskitt.*



SOCIETY EXCURSIONS

18 May 2008

Botanising at Royden Fen (below left); urban plant-hunters by the A1066 in Diss (below). See article.

Photos: Janet Negal.





DACTYLORHIZA ORCHIDS at Hellesdon Pastures, near Norwich. Above, Southern Marsh Orchids; below left, Early Marsh Orchid; below right, Southern Marsh and Common Spotted Orchids. See article. *Photos: Craig Robson.*





LESSER BLADDERWORT (above)
Catfield 17 June 2008. Much rarer in
Norfolk than Greater Bladderwort, and
a shy flowerer with few recent records
in the county, this species may grow
undetected at other Norfolk sites. *Photo:*
Simon Harrap/norfolknature.co.uk.

GREATER BLADDERWORT
above left: South Lopham Fen June 2008
photo: Craig Robson; below left: Catfield
17 June 2008 *photo:* Simon Harrap/
norfolknature.co.uk.

A NOTE ON *LYNGBYA FERRUGINEA* WEST

K. B. CLARKE

In July, 1955, the author was shown a dark brown mass which had caused trouble by blocking circulating pumps at a Lowestoft cannery. It was of a rather firm consistency with a slimy feel and contained insect larvae and eggs.

Water was drawn into the circulating pump from a tank and sprayed on to hot cans to cool them ; it then drained back to the tank. Before being admitted to the tank the water had been chlorinated to 2 p.p.m.

On examination the main part of the deposit consisted of a gelatinous material in which particles of iron salt were embedded. There were, however, many filaments protruding from it and distributed about. These contained pale blue-green cells, about twice as long as broad and under 1 micron in diameter, which could be seen where they protruded from the sheath or where the sheath was transparent. Occasionally the sheath protruded beyond the trichome. The trichomes were straight. Exact diagnosis was not possible at the time, but a dried specimen and glycerine jelly slide were retained. These allowed later diagnosis from the description in Geitler (1932)* as *Lyngbya ferruginea*, a species which West reported from Dominica. Its occurrence in Lowestoft can be explained by the factory bordering on the harbour, and imports from tropical countries, e.g. sugar, to the factory. The temperature of the water was a little below blood heat, which would provide a favorable site for the development of tropical algae.

Some material was accidentally left in Ringers solution for a month and seemed to grow well. A new flocculent deposit of much lighter colour (light ochre) was produced and the sides of the tube were stained with ochre. The cannery was very concerned that the deposit provided a substrate for other forms of life, notably bacteria which might be drawn into the cans as they cooled and cause "blowing." The system was, therefore, thoroughly cleaned and the alga did not reappear.

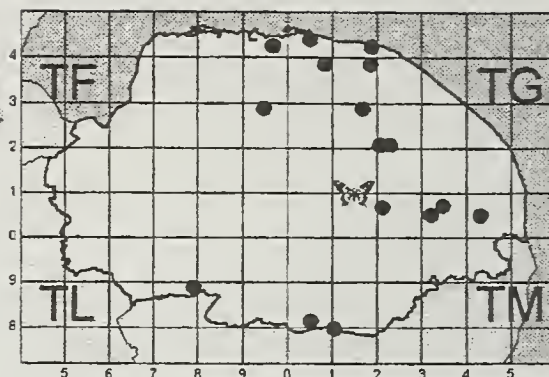
*Geitler, L (1932). "Cyanophyceae." In Rabenhorst's Kryptogamenflora von Deutschland, Osterreich u.d. Schweiz 14.



Excursion

Reports

● 2008-09 Field
Meeting location
Easton College
Indoor meetings



Diss Fair Green, Roydon Fen & Wortham Ling

Sunday 18th May, 2008



Expecting Diss to be slumbering in Sunday morning peace, a joint party from the Society and the Lowestoft Field Club arrived in Park Road at 10.00a.m to find a huge car-boot sale already under way on land adjoining the car park and a line of cars competing in the search for parking spaces. Possibly some of the intending participants in our mainly botanical circular walk never found a space and beat a retreat, but those of us who did manage to park quickly crossed the A1066 and made our way first to the relative calm of nearby Diss Fair Green.

This was our first formally-arranged joint field meeting with the Lowestoft naturalists, though some have of course attended our excursions in the past. Having Arthur Copping as our leader meant we benefited from his special expertise in grasses supplementing his more general botanical knowledge and that of other members. So, with recorders both from Norfolk and Suffolk closely noting, respectively, what was found on each side of the Waveney, the meeting comprised a full-day identification and recording session rather than a steady walk.

Of special interest at Diss Fair green is Bulbous Meadow-grass, a tufted perennial with swollen bulb-like culms almost restricted to southern England and East Anglia. It is very rarely found inland and is uncommon nationally even in its preferred coastal habitat of barish places on open ground or short grassland, including sandy soil, shingle or limestone. Arthur soon refound *Poa bulbosa* at its only known Norfolk inland site, remarking that it is probably under-recorded because it rarely flowers, though human disturbance in the shape of the Autumn Fair still held annually on the Green probably helps rather than hinders its persistence there. It was also good to see Meadow saxifrage in flower.

We moved on to Roydon Fen, stopping *en route* to admire fair quantities of Clary just flowering on an urban verge – a dry bank really - on the north side of the A1066 between Denmark Road and Taylor Close. Such was its abundance that members wondered why the site was not designated a roadside nature reserve.



Also seen here were various 'urban' weeds, including Annual Wall Rocket. Roydon Fen provided a much wetter and a richer site with too many 'good' plants to list here, but Bob Ellis refound Flea Sedge, *Carex pulicaris*, which had disappeared some time ago from another Roydon Fen site near the boardwalk and had been feared lost at Roydon altogether. Mary Ghulam found what she and others present thought was almost certainly a young plant of Greater Burnet, a species not seen there since 1970, though it remains to be determined. There were also nice patches – 'stands' perhaps – of Greater Meadow-rue nearby.

The Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve of Wortham Ling, a fair trek from Roydon Fen, is a common with a mix of habitats: woodland and scrub, short acid grassland, heathland, ponds and chalky areas. Notable plants reported as growing there include Golden-rod, Dwarf thistle, Thyme and Dropwort with 'occasional' Bee and Pyramidal orchids. The site is, very visibly, good for lichens and mosses. Our party, keeping a special look-out for grasses, recorded Mat Grass (*Nardus stricta*), Fine-leaved Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca filiformis*), Downy – and also Meadow Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pubescens* and *H. pratense*), the nationally-scarce Bearded Fescue (*Vulpia ciliate* ssp. *ambigua*) and Early Hair-grass (*Aira praecox*). Non-grasses found included Shepherd's Cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*), the nationally-scarce Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*), the decreasing Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and Greater Wild Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*).

Many thanks to Arthur Copping for preparing and leading the meeting.

Stephen Martin

St. Margaret's Church, Stratton Strawless

***Long-Term Changes in Norfolk: a meeting to mark the
tricentenary of the birth of Robert Marsham FRS
(1708-1797)***

Saturday 7th June, 2008



Despite persistent overnight and morning rain, some 80 members, representatives of other wildlife and nature conservation bodies, villagers and members of the public, gathered in Stratton's beautiful grade-1 medieval church to celebrate the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Robert Marsham, who lies buried in the churchyard.



Marsham, ultimately a Fellow of the Royal Society, lived at nearby Stratton Hall. He was a dedicated agricultural improver and tree-planter (introducing over 2 million trees to his estate, it is said), but is perhaps best remembered today as a pioneering Norfolk naturalist and as the 'Father of English Phenology', a science very relevant now to climate-change studies. This of course involves recording systematically nature's distinct seasonal events over an extended period. Marsham recorded his 'indications of spring' such as the first flowering of the snowdrop and the appearance of the first swallow at Stratton for many years from 1736, and his family continued the tradition right down to 1958, building up an almost uniquely early yet long-continuing dataset that is proving invaluable to today's phenologists and other scientists.

Saturday's celebration, organised by our Society in association with Stratton Strawless Parochial Church Council, took the form of a one day conference with seven notable speakers, skilfully chaired by Dr. Gerry Barnes of the Environmental Section at County Hall. The talks and discussions were punctuated by a lunchtime walk - once the rain had relented - to see Marsham's famous giant Cedar of Lebanon, planted by him in 1747 and, at 102 feet in height and with a circumference of 23 feet at the beginning of the twenty-first century, one of the oldest in Europe. This was a rare opportunity, as there is no public access to the cedar. Those who preferred not to take the rather sodden walk to the tree were treated instead to a lunchtime photographic show of Stratton through the years by Tony Eskitt of nearby Buxton.

A prime instigator of the series of Marsham events at Stratton this year has been Dr. Tim Sparks, prominent ecologist from the Institute of Ecology and Hydrology at Monks Wood. He has co-authored with John Lines a short book, *Chapters in the life of Robert Marsham*, the proceeds from the sale of which will be generously donated towards the upkeep and care of St. Margaret's Church. Tim started the meeting with an account of Marsham, which was followed by a talk by Nick Collinson, appropriately of the Woodland Trust, on phenology in Norfolk.

In harmony again with Marsham's sylvicultural interests were two fascinating talks dealing with trees from quite different perspectives. First, Dr. Tom Melvin, working in dendroclimatology at the Climatic Research Unit of the University of East Anglia, who has been involved in research projects in Scandinavia and Siberia, had fascinating things to say on how extreme climatic events and variations revealed by tree rings can sometimes be synchronized with known crises in human history. Tom is now studying Norfolk oaks. After lunch, our recent president, Professor Tom Williamson of the UEA School of History Landscape Group, talked of ancient Norfolk trees as indicators of landscape history, with interesting observations that documentary evidence precisely dating the planting of certain old trees often contradicts or radically qualifies formulae and popular beliefs supposedly linking the age of a tree closely to its girth and the soil conditions.



Trees did not monopolise the meeting, which was agreeably varied by a talk on changes in Norfolk butterfly populations by Nick Greatorex-Davies, Tim Sparks' colleague at CEH, and by an account of long term trends in bird populations from Dr. Dave Leech of the British Trust for Ornithology in Thetford (and our Society!). Dave stressed the importance to many current wildlife survey projects of amateur naturalists and nature-lovers alike continuing to 'observe and record' in the Marham tradition and pointed to invaluable data painstakingly gathered over extended periods by such prominent members of the Society as Dr Ian Keymer, Anne Brewster and Alec Bull. Alec himself brought the programme of talks fittingly to an end by speaking about the contemporaries and successors of Marham who helped establish and maintain Norfolk's eminence in the field of natural history, and the very real sense of history felt by many of those present at the meeting was intensified by a few words from the great-great-great grandson of Robert Marham.

The chairman closed the meeting with thanks to the speakers and to those who organised, ran and contributed to it, which were owed especially to the assured but friendly efficiency of Mrs. T. Waddingham and her helpers at Stratton, who prepared and served refreshments and a wonderful lunch which far surpassed what those present expected from its description in the Programme as merely a buffet! Discussion at lunch, morning and afternoon refreshments, and during the talks helped promote much more 'networking' among the large number present than our meetings can usually hope to achieve.

An interesting Robert Marham exhibition has run daily in the church throughout the spring and summer, but additional material reflecting the wealth and diversity of wildlife studies and recording by today's Norfolk naturalists was on view at the tricentenary meeting, including displays of data from Tony Leech (Autumn lady's tresses, 1980-2007), Ian Keymer (migrant arrival dates and nesting times from the 1930s), Mike Hall (moth flight periods, 1988-2007), Margaret Howe (frog spawning dates, 1983-2008), Anne Brewster ('indications of spring' phenology; otter records on the Bure, 1993-2005; distribution of Corpusty Harvest Mice; Corpusty amphibian breeding sites, 1979/80), Dave Leech / NBRC / Norfolk Mammal Database (Chinese Water Deer – Norfolk invasion since 1974), as well as a display illustrating the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's own phenology recording programme instigated this last spring. At the time of writing, copies of the Sparks and Lines book on Marham were on offer at a cost of £5 each (inclusive of p.&p.): check if still available with Toz Waddingham on 01603 279235 or see the Marham website: www.robertmarham.co.uk

Stephen Martin



RSPB STRUMPSHAW FEN

Sunday 15th June, 2008

This visit was another in the long series of joint field meetings with the Great Yarmouth Naturalists' Society, whose members attended in force to swell our rather more modest numbers. The reserve is a very popular destination on early summer Sundays, and the search to find a parking space was reminiscent of the challenge we had encountered at Diss less than a month previously. We were met by the Mid-Yare Warden, Tim Strudwick, who, after we had admired the Bee orchids near the car park, kindly accompanied us on a circular walk round the reserve and explained current and future conservation activities there, including additional areas designated for scrub clearance.

Many members will be familiar with this well-known reserve, which is also well-recorded, so it would be superfluous to provide full species lists here. Suffice to say that the birders present were rewarded by a rich haul which included a Hobby and Marsh Harrier and Cetti's, Reed and Sedge Warblers, and the fen and wetland plants were remarkable in their plenitude and variety: within a stretch of a couple of hundred metres just before and then alongside the boardwalk I listed some 34 interesting plants in flower, including Water-soldier, Cowbane, Common Meadow-rue, Marsh Cinquefoil, Marsh Pea, Marsh Stitchwort, Skullcap and – not yet quite in flower – Yellow Loosestrife. Also seen were a Scorpion Fly, Garden Tiger Caterpillar, 3 Hawker Dragonflies, Carder Bee, Soldier Beetle, various leaf galls and a 'writhing mass' of Peacock caterpillars on a single plant. It clouded over as lunchtime approached, and we were doomed to disappointment in our hope to see swallowtails, though, inevitably, a couple we met on the boardwalk had glimpsed one just before we arrived.

Towards the end of the walk the party split, with many climbing the steps to a hide and others continuing round the path above the orchid meadows, where Southern Marsh and Common Spotted - and Yellow-rattle - could be seen, though penetrating rain (which later cleared) occasioned a rapid return to the car park.

Stephen Martin

Beeston Butterfly

Francis Farrow



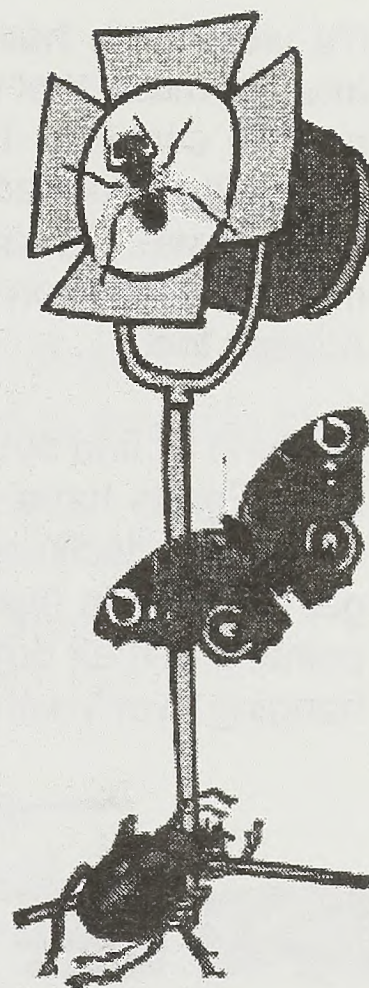
Skipping work last July 16th to help with 'Sheringham in Bloom' events I first took my morning walk with the dog over Beeston Common. As I walked across the top of one of the boggy valleys near some scrub I became aware of a dark butterfly landing on top of a small willow to the side of me. On glancing around I was very surprised to see a White Admiral. It is the only second one I have seen on the Common - the first in 2006. Luckily I had the camera handy.



Survey Spotlight

Putting our birds on the map – the 'New New' BTO Atlas

My name is Dave Leech and I'm an atlas-aholic. I know I'm not alone – were we to convene a support meeting, I'd expect to see the majority of my colleagues at the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in attendance and I'm sure that nearly all of the naturalists I meet through the N&NNS would come along too. There is just something about pawing over maps that show the distribution of flora and fauna, from a local to a national scale, that is incredibly addictive, particularly when they allow you to see how species ranges have changed over time. Atlases are also a vital weapon in the armoury of conservationists, particularly in these times of rapid habitat degradation and climatic change, illustrating the responses of animal and plants in a way that can be understood even by those with the most basic understanding of the natural world.



Over the last 40 years, the dedicated work of thousands of birdwatchers have enabled the BTO to produce three monumental atlases. The 1968-72 Breeding Bird Atlas (Sharrock, 1976) was one of the first to be completed anywhere in the world and provided detailed maps of where all bird species bred in Britain and Ireland. This was followed by a Winter Bird Atlas (Lack 1986) and the 'New' Breeding Bird Atlas (Gibbons 1993), which included information about abundance as well as distribution.

A lot has changed since 1991, which can only mean one thing – it's time for the BTO, along with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Birdwatch Ireland, to launch the 'New New' BTO Atlas project, which aims to cover both the winter and summer months. Fieldwork began in 2007 and is due to finish at the end of 2011, so there's plenty of time for you to get involved and several ways in which you can help.

Every single bird that you see anywhere in the country qualifies as a *Roving Record*, helping us build up detailed distribution maps at a national scale. We're also interested in looking at change in the number of birds present, and you can contribute to this part of the project by undertaking four *Timed Tetrad Visits* of between one and two hours, counting the birds that you see.



To find out more about how to take part and how to submit your records, visit the Bird Atlas website at www.bto.org/birdatlas/ and, as ever, feel free to email me at dave.leech@bto.org if you have any questions.

It's well worth having a look at the website regularly as the wonders of the Internet mean that we're able to display some of the results as we go. The 8,600 people currently taking part have already submitted over 800,000 *Roving Records* and a made a staggering 45,600 *Timed Tetrad Visits*, so there's already a lot to see. What's more, all the maps from the previous atlases have been made available on-line so you'll be able to look at the results from the previous Atlases too.

So, help us find out how far eastwards Common Buzzards have spread, whether Little Egrets have reached the centre of the country and how our attempts to rescue the declining Barn Owl population have fared. Don't miss your chance to get involved in this prestigious publication – after all, when all your friends are pointing to their dots on the map, do you really want the shame of a blank space hanging over your garden?

RESEARCH

Round-up

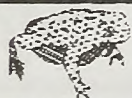
Records count

The recent edition of '*Butterfly*' (Summer 2008) Butterfly Conservation's magazine gives a table comparing data collected from their National Garden Butterfly Survey. The table compares 2007 data with the good summer of 2006 and the cold, wet summer of 1993.

Looking at the most widespread species it really shows how much the Small Tortoiseshell has declined.

% gardens recording presence of species

	2007	2006	1993
Red Admiral	95	98	90
Peacock	94	92	91
Large White	91	93	92
Small White	89	91	85
Small Tortoiseshell	76	80	92





The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' will be November 2008. Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by

October 1st 2008 to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,
Norfolk, NR26 8QD Email: francis.f@virgin.net

Please send all photographic material to:
Simon Harrap, 1 Norwich Road, Edgefield,
Melton Constable, Norfolk, NR22 2RP Email: harrap@onetel.net

Membership subscriptions

The N&NNS membership year runs from 1st April to 31st March. During this time members will receive four copies of the quarterly *Natterjack* newsletter, and annual copies of the Transactions of the Society, and the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report.

Membership renewals are due on *1st April each year* and should be sent to the treasurer:

- David Richmond, 42 Richmond Rise, Reepham, Norfolk, NR10 4LS.

New memberships should be sent to:

- David Paull, 8 Lindford Drive, Eaton, Norwich, NR4 6LT.

Current rates are £12 for individual and family memberships (£15 for groups, £18.50 overseas).

Cheques payable to: Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.

Contents

Toad-in-the-hole.....	Page 1
More views on Nostoc <i>Alec Bull</i> (<i>Cyanobacteria</i>)	
Colonisation of former farmland by four species of orchid <i>Craig Robson</i>	Page 2
National Trust Gardens: Appeal for specialists <i>Mary Ghullam</i>	
Identification of <i>Gonocerus acuteangulatus</i> (Box Bug)	Page 3
- A first for Norfolk? <i>Doreen Wells</i>	
A find from far away (2) <i>Maurice Davenport</i>	
Minsmere Birds <i>Tony Howes</i>	Page 4
New behaviour by garden Wood Pigeons <i>Don Dorling</i>	
Purple? More likely, blue (with cold) <i>David Paull</i> (<i>Purple Sandpiper</i>)	Page 5
The Raptorial Songbirds <i>Hans Watson</i> (<i>Great Grey Shrike</i>)	Page 6
Penbrokehire Birds <i>Tony Howes</i>	Page 7
Norfolk Bird Atlas - an update <i>Moss Taylor</i>	Page 8
What a turn up! <i>Francis Farrow</i> (<i>Mudwort</i>)	
NATS' GALLERY (<i>Members photographs</i>)	Centre
NNNS Transactions - 50 years ago	Page 9
A note on <i>Lyngbya ferruginea</i> West <i>K.B. Clarke</i> (<i>Tropical algae</i>)	
EXCURSION Reports:	Page 10
Diss Fair Green, Royden Fen & Wortham Ling (<i>Steven Martin</i>)	
St. Margaret's Church, Stratton Strawless (<i>Steven Martin</i>) (Robert Marsham tricentenary)	Page 11
RSBP Strumpshaw Fen (<i>Steven Martin</i>)	Page 14
Beeston Butterfly <i>Francis Farrow</i> (<i>White Admiral</i>)	
SURVEY Spotlight	Page 15
New BTO Atlas (<i>Dave Leech</i>)	
RESEARCH Round-up	Page 16